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Ensuring your food is safe after flooding

The West Virginia Bureau for Public Health has issued guidelines for the safe handling of food and household items that have been exposed to flood water. Using foods, household products, medicines and cosmetics that have been exposed to flood waters may pose a threat to health. Such items should be immediately destroyed in a manner approved by your state or local sanitarian. The following may serve as a guideline in answering questions about dealing with food.

All fresh fruits and vegetables exposed to flood water should be destroyed. Fruits and vegetables exposed to flood water in home gardens should not be used. All meats, including fresh, dried, frozen and home canned, should be destroyed, except those in hermetically sealed containers (tin cans) that remain airtight. Foods, such as cereals, bakery goods, dried fruits, flour, frozen foods, sugar, salt, and similar foods in paper or plastic containers or wrapping should be destroyed.

Foods, household products, medicines and cosmetics in containers with screw caps or crimped caps should be destroyed. All perishable foods (foods requiring refrigeration) should be destroyed if they have been without refrigeration for four or more hours. Foods that have thawed or partially thawed should be destroyed; however frozen foods that have remained in a closed freezer and have not been exposed to flood water or other contamination may be safe for use provided the time absent refrigeration doesn't exceed 24 hours.

For more information on flood safety go online to www.wvdhhr.org/phs/disaster/index.asp or contact your local health department or the Office of Environmental Health at 304- 558-2981 or 1-800-922-1255.

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